relationship with Russia, particularly in the oil, gas and defence sectors; and

(b) whether Government are contemplating any concrete initiatives to encourage increased interaction between business and political leaders of the two countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Mr. Ilya Klebanov, Minister of Industry and Science & Technology of the Russian Federation, visited India on 21-22 November 2002. During this visit, the Inter-Session Review Meeting of the Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission on trade, economic, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation was held. The Meeting was co-chaired by Minister of External Affairs Shri Yashwant Sinha and Mr. Klebanov. The two sides discussed, *inter alia,* new possibilities of cooperation in economic and trade fields. It was decided that cooperation in oil and gas sector which includes the participation of the ONBC-Videsh Ltd in the Sakhalin-I project in Russia and of the Joint Stock company Gazprom in the Block No. 26 (NEC-OSN-91/1) in the Bay of Bengal in India, should be further strengthened. No concrete project was however discussed. During his visit, Mr. Klebanov met with Raksha Mantri Shri George Fernandes and reviewed a number of areas of bilateral defence cooperation between the two sides.

(b) There are regular exchanges of business and political leaders and delegations between Russia and India. H.E. Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, is scheduled to visit India from 3-5 December 2002.

Progress in Economic Cooperation within SAARC Framework

967. SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN:
SHRIJ.CHITHARANJAN:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the progress in economic cooperation with the SAARC framework has not been satisfactory for sometimes;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) Government's attitude to the forthcoming summit in Islamabad?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

(b) The SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement) Framework Treaty was sigaed in 1993. Till date the full operationalisation of this arrangement is yet to take place. In addition, SAARC has missed the deadline of 2001 for drawing up a Framework Treaty for a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).The new deadline for the drafting of the Treaty is now 2002.

(c) While India is fully committed to the SAARC process, Government of India feels that there should be substantial progress specially in the eco-cooperation agenda for the SAARC Summit to be meaningful.

Conversion of LoC into International Border

† 968. SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI:
SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:
SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Pakistan is trying to convert LoC into international border;

(b) whether the Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has sent any proposal for recognizing the Line of Control as the permanent border between India and Pakistan on the northern sector;

(c) if so, the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) The State of Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian Union. A part of the territory of the State is under the forcible and illegal occupation of Pakistan. Pakistan has been actively supporting terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir with the objective of territorial gains.

(b) No such proposal has been received from the President of Pakistan.

(c) Does not arise.

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.